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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 311155Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2875
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 0588
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1931

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASTANA 001374

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2018

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR YERTYSBAYEV
SUGGESTS THE POSSIBILITY OF EARLY ELECTIONS

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Steven Fagin, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Nazarbayev advisor (and former Culture and Information Minister) Yermukhamet Yertysbayev told the Ambassador on July 21 that the government is looking for a way to bring in a multi-party parliament before taking over the OSCE chairmanship in 2010. Early elections, he explained, are not likely in 2008, given the domestic economic situation, but are a possibility for 2009. Yertysbayev maintained that Nazarbayev was inclined to hold early elections, a position that Yertysbayev was strongly pushing. He admitted that the final decision would be Nazarbayev's and had not yet been taken.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador suggested that it might be difficult for the government to conduct free and fair elections given that oblast akims (governors) believe they have to outdo themselves in "delivering" votes for Nazarbayev's Nur Otan party. Yertysbayev admitted that this is a danger, and that new elections could thus yield a "multi-party parliament" consisting of Nur Otan plus a Nur Otan surrogate party such as Adilet, rather than a genuine opposition party.

¶3. (C) Yertysbayev explained to the Ambassador that in his view, Kazakhstan currently has only three viable political parties: Nur Otan, Azat, and the unregistered Alga. (Comment: Yertysbayev was thus discounting the relevance of Zharmakhan Tuyakbay's OSDP and Serikbolsyn Abdildin's Communists. Based on our own observations, OSDP and the Communist Party are, in fact, less organized and less active than Azat and Alga. End Comment.) Both Azat and Alga have good financing, Yertysbayev maintained, with Kazkommertsbank owner Nurzhan Subkhanberdin providing funds to Azat, and Bank TuranAlem Chairman Mukhtar Ablyazov bankrolling Alga from the shadows. Yertysbayev contended that Alga's registration has been held up specifically because Ablyazov has not been transparent in his support for Alga.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador stressed to Yertysbayev the importance of moving forward on democratic reforms, expressing specific concerns about the government's domination of the broadcast media and restrictions on rallies and protests. In response, Yertysbayev said he was optimistic that the government would follow through on its Madrid commitments.

¶5. (C) Comment: There are several arguments against Nazarbayev deciding to hold early parliamentary elections -- most important, that another round of bad elections would be worse for Kazakhstan's image than maintaining the one-party parliament. On the other hand, no parliament since the country's independence has sat through its full term. The fact that Nazarbayev recently met separately with opposition leaders Abilov and Tuyakbay could indicate that a deal is the horizon about bringing the opposition into parliament. Yertysbayev gave an interview for the July 24 edition of the opposition newspaper Svoboda Slova (his second Svoboda Slova interview in the months since he was named a Nazarbayev advisor) in which he publicly implied his personal support for early elections. As Yertysbayev put it to Svoboda Slova,

when Kazakhstan becomes the first Asian country to chair the OSCE, "we want Kazakhstan to look respectable, (we want) the Europeans to see that the full spectrum of basic political forces is represented in the Kazakhstani parliament." The timing of elections, he stressed, is an issue for Nur Otan to decide, just like in Britain, where the ruling party names the date of early elections -- a date when political and economic conditions are most favorable for that party. End Comment.
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